

Games venue aims to seize the day

Soldier Hollow
hopes to capitalize
on Olympic image

Soldier Hollow hosts one of three Olympic-style events beginning this weekend; see A9, 10.

By Gib Twyman
Deseret News staff writer

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MIDWAY — Soldier Hollow is trying to quick-time its march toward an Olympic afterlife.

"We think we have a plan to have this baby up and running before 2002," Rep. David Ure, R-Kamas, said of the site for the Salt Lake Olympics cross-country/biathlon events.

"And we believe we can have it running on a self-sustaining basis without the giant sucking sound of continuous government subsidies."

While legacy planning is an edgy subject at all Olympic venues, there has been an extra note of urgency here since Soldier Hollow missed out on a \$40 million kitty that is perpetuating the Oquirrh Park speed-skating and Winter Sports Park bobsled/luge/ski jumping sites.

So Soldier Hollow has to play catch-up in developing an economic plan ensuring that recreationists can enjoy the venue once the Games are gone.

One key to current plans envisioned by Ure, Rep. Gordon Snow, R-Roosevelt, and other key players: building a day lodge by next summer.

That would accomplish two things:



SCOTT G. WILHEITON, DESERET NEWS

"He doesn't know what is going on," said Marisleyis Gonzalez, a cousin. "We don't want to make him feel bad."

On NBC's "Today" show Thursday, she said the boy hasn't been told of the decision because it may not prove final. Referring to his surviving two days at sea, she said, "There's been a miracle. I still have hope there will be another one."

"It's very hard for us to tell him he has to go back," she said.

Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Doris Meissner announced the government's decision Wednesday, saying the boy and his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, had a "close and continuous relationship" even though the



Georgina Cid, left, and Marisleyis Gonzalez, cousins of Elian Gonzalez, and lawyer Spencer Eig show sadness.

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Joel Fernandez leads protest chant. Sign says, "Elian, dolphins saved you, Clinton wants to throw you back to sharks."

boy's parents were divorced.

Meissner said the elder Gonzalez "made it very clear that he wants Elian returned to him as soon as possible." She said the child must be back in Cuba by Jan. 14.

The decision was denounced by lawyers for the boy's U.S. relatives, who asked Attorney General Janet Reno to reverse the decision and planned to ask a federal judge for a restraining order. They contend

the INS is violating its own rules by not allowing the boy to apply for asylum.

"I always thought this was a place of liberty, and they are not letting him keep that liberty," Gonzalez said. "It's always about the father. What about the mother? That was his mother's will."

David Abraham, an immigration law professor at the University of Miami, said the family won't have

much of a case.

"There is no legal basis" to block Elian's return, Abraham said. "If this child came from anywhere else, he would have been home within 48 hours."

The boy was found Thanksgiving Day clinging to an inner tube at sea after his mother, stepfather and nine others died while trying to reach Florida. He has since lived with relatives in Miami, who say

they could give him a better life.

The issue has led to huge protests in Cuba, where Castro and others have demanded the boy's return. On Wednesday, the Cuban government warned against "excessive optimism" about the decision.

President Clinton said he had honored a pledge to keep politics from the issue and said the INS decided "after an exhaustive review of the facts."

New base closings called unlikely in election year

Scripps Howard News Service

WASHINGTON — Communities fearful their military bases might go on the chopping block can relax for at least another year.

That's because the odds of Congress authorizing another round of base closings this election year are virtually nil, according to Capitol Hill, Pentagon and think-tank experts.

"Near as I can tell, there is zero likelihood of an authorization this year," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Va.

When the Pentagon unveils its fiscal 2001 budget either later this month or in early February, it is likely to include a plea for a fifth, and even sixth, round of closings.

In order to afford the modernization of aging

weapons and the procurement of spare parts, the military says it must shutter installations no longer needed now that the size of the armed services has essentially been halved since the end of the Cold War.

Closing 50 such facilities would free up about \$21 billion, the Pentagon estimates.

This is an argument President Clinton and Defense Secretary William Cohen have made without any success for the past three years. In recent remarks, Cohen has telegraphed a certain resignation that this year would not be the charm, either.

"It will fall to the next guys," one Pentagon official said, meaning the issue will pass on to whomever wins the November presidential and congressional elections.

Even in less politicized times, closing military

bases is one of the least popular tasks facing both the White House and Congress. Realizing that, Congress and the executive branch adopted the concept of using an independent commission to come up with a list of bases to close, and then restricting both Congress and the president to only two choices: accepting the commission's list in its entirety or rejecting it.

Although the first three rounds were politically painful, they were deemed generally successful. But the fourth, which concluded in 1995, took a turn that critics say poisoned the impartiality of the process.

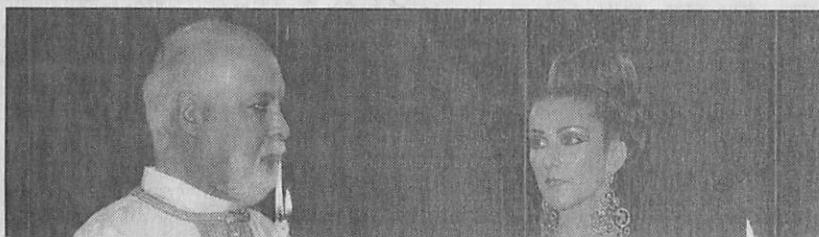
Clinton intervened to save jobs at Air Force maintenance depots in vote-rich Texas and California. Clinton said the intervention was justified for military and economic reasons. Republicans cried foul.

Did the Lander break apart in Mars canyon?

DENVER (AP) — The vanishing Mars Polar Lander probably broke apart in a canyon, The Denver Post reported Thursday, citing scientists who suggested the landing site was the reason for NASA's latest failure.

The \$165 million lander was supposed to touch down Dec. 3 for a day mission to analyze the planet's atmosphere and search for frozen water beneath its south pole. It has not been heard from since it started its descent after an 11-month cruise, and NASA has not offered a reason for the disappearance.

Members of the Lockheed Martin team who maneuvered the craft to Mars believe a canyon nearly a mile deep and 6 miles wide in some places was the landing site, the Post reported, citing an unidentified source at the aeronautics



Son follows mother's path: drives off same cliff she did

PARADISE, Calif. (AP) — Daniel Oberts climbed into his silver Mazda on New Year's Eve, sped up to 50 mph and drove off a cliff, killing himself in the process.

SOLDIER HOLLOW

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One, start coins clinking into the coffers.

"It'll get skiers on the slopes next winter, generating revenue," Ure said.

Two, it would show the world some style points — a must if Soldier Hollow is to make an impression on deep-pocket European and Asian destination skiers dying to whet cross-country appetites on the kind of prestige Olympic terrain offers.

"We absolutely have to have the lodge in place before the Games to take advantage of this window to the world, with billions of people watching on TV and 10,000 media on the ground," said Howard Peterson, of Francis, Summit County, who has spent most of his life in and around elite cross-country skiing circles and is a member of the Soldier Hollow Legacy Committee.

"That exposure will never happen again. We build the lodge after the Games, the world will never see it. We'll have missed the boat," said Peterson, who founded the Cross Country Ski Areas Association in 1977 and was executive director and CEO of the U.S. Ski Association and U.S. cross-country ski team from 1981-94.

As with most things involving the Games, money will talk before the deal is done.

"That's where we come in," Ure said of Snow and himself.

Their charge: Convince fellow legislators to pony up \$700,000 this year for the day lodge and \$350,000 over each of the following two years.

"The second- and third-year expenditures will enable us to build some lower-level trails for beginners and buy out SLOC equipment," said Bob Mathis, Midway, Soldier Hollow Olympic coordinator.

To fund or not to fund

The first part of the \$1.4 million total package may be the hardest sell in the Legislature, in a year when education is clamoring to the forefront for attention and infrastructure needs remain.

"The budget's going to be tight," said Snow, in whose district the venue rests. "But I think there's an awfully good chance it can be done."

The timing may never be better, after locals spent considerable effort buttering up legislators during their September interim tour to Wasatch and Summit counties.

"I think the fact we had them all up there and

they saw with their own eyes what this place looks like doesn't hurt," Snow said. "After the presentations we made, this request won't come as any surprise. They've been pretty warmed up for the idea."

The idea still could face tough sledding. Legislators not so close to the Olympics may object to dipping into the public till for what they see as a highly local project.

"I just disagree with that use of public funds," said Rep. Dennis Iverson, R-Washington. "That's why taxes keep going up and up. If they want to build such a facility, then they ought to get local interests who benefit from it to get together and do it."

"I won't even support that type of thing in my own area — and I've got two or three of them."

To put together research that might sway doubters, the Soldier Hollow committee sent Peterson on a tour of successful cross-country ski centers across North America. He said his studies show Soldier Hollow can deliver the goods in scenery, accessibility, quality of terrain.

"What are we missing? Lower-level terrain and a lodge," Peterson said.

The lodge would offer atmosphere and amenities. Fireplaces, food, ski rentals, some retail, lessons. No overnight lodging.

"It's a cozy place you can come in and put your skis on or take your snowshoes off, sit in front of the fire, have a cup of hot chocolate," Peterson said. "You have to offer this to destination skiers in particular."

Soldier Hollow also can add something unique to the destination skier: the Heber Valley Historic Railroad.

"I see the train as a signature part of the marketing," Peterson said.

'Best of them all'

"There is no other cross-country setting offering this. Europeans and Asians are fascinated with the Wild West. Utah has that heritage and the great part it played in developing transcontinental rail. It's a perfect fit."

The goal would be to attract 38,000 annual skier-days to Soldier Hollow, Peterson said. That would include 3,000 elite and aspiring Olympic athletes, 20,000 paying customers and 15,000 youths paying next to nothing.

Of the paying customers, it's estimated 4,000 would be destination skiers, the rest from the Wasatch Front and Back.

None of that seems unreasonable, Peterson said. The largest cross-country center in North America, Royal Gorge Nordic Ski Resort in Soda Springs, Calif., draws 111,000 a year.

"Twenty-thousand's modest, in the medium range," Peterson said.

Peterson said when Jeremy Ranch operated cross-country skiing several years ago, its top figures were around 25,000. And 20,000 isn't a make-or-break number anyway, he said.

"We actually can break even on much less than that — we're figuring about 12,000. But 20,000 is our goal," he said.

Peterson estimates there are 250 centers affiliated with the cross-country association. Maybe 200 more wild cards. There's a long string of them in Colorado — Vail, Breckenridge, Frisco, Aspen, Crested Butte, Steamboat Springs, Winter Park.

"A full-on cross-country resort is one of the few things Utah lacks," Peterson said. "We can have the best of them all right here."

Nothing is more central to the plan than kids. The plan calls for them to pay no more than \$2 for anything — day pass, rentals, lessons.

"Leaving something for our kids, getting them involved in the Olympic experience, is by far the main reason for doing this," Ure said.

Another challenge besides money: The private-foundation part of the plan will have to blend with federal land-use regulations. Specifically, the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1964, according to Steve Roberts, government relations coordinator for the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation.

"Ownership and control are the key words," Roberts said. "A Soldier Hollow Legacy Foundation board could run winter activities on a contract management basis. If they own or control, you get the feds on you."

Most parties involved believe that can be handled.

"There's certainly middle ground. Their desires and our desires are not that different," Roberts said. "It's how we scope and sculpt this thing that matters."

"I think we can come up with an agreement that achieves harmony on the use issue," Ure said.

Mathis said, "In fact, one of the things I like about the plan is that it respects the state park. It'll still belong to the people."

"I'm excited about this project. I believe the research is sound. I think there's good synergy, with a lot of good people working well together."

BRIEFS

NEWS CAPSULES

A moderate earthquake rattles southern Alaska

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — A moderate earthquake and two aftershocks rattled far southern Alaska early Thursday, but little damage was immediately reported, said Bruce Turner of the West Coast and Alaska Tsunami Warning Center.

The quake and two aftershocks shook the state capital Juneau and the towns of Sitka, Hoonah and Gustavus, but Turner said there were few immediate reports of damage.

Heart attack doesn't prevent truck's delivery to food bank

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — A truck driver who suffered a heart attack while making a food-bank delivery took steps to ensure that the food would be delivered before he was taken to a hospital.

Jim Callison, 63, brought a semitruck of fresh produce from Springfield, Ohio, to the Oakland County Food Bank Wednesday morning.

Sensing the onset of a heart attack, he called 911 and was rushed to the hospital. Before he left, he placed the keys to his truck in the ignition so that it could be unloaded and moved.

Oakland County Food Bank Executive Director Helen Kozlowski expressed appreciation that delivery operations could proceed.

Airline pays \$50,000 penalty over security screenings

WASHINGTON (AP) — United

Jamal "Shyne" Barrow, 21, was part of the rap mogul's entourage and allegedly wounded three people at Club NY after a dispute, authorities said. He was indicted Wednesday.

Combs is charged with illegal possession of a gun. Prosecutors declined to charge his girlfriend, actress Jennifer Lopez, who was with Combs that night.

Besides attempted murder, Barrow is charged with assault, reckless endangerment and criminal possession of a weapon. The attempted murder charge is punishable by up to 25 years in prison.

Barrow's lawyer, Murray Richman, said his client will fight the charges in court.

Suspect in Kansas standoff faces robbery, gun charges

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP) — The woman arrested last week after an eight-hour standoff at a bank outside Kansas City has been indicted on robbery and gun charges by a federal grand jury.

The government says Pheng "Nicki" Soumolphakdy-Siriboury, 23, told investigators she tried to rob the bank to solve her financial problems.

She was charged Wednesday with attempted bank robbery, using a gun in a violent crime and taking hostages in the New Year's Eve incident at a Bank of America branch in the suburb of Olathe.

She is accused of entering the bank carrying a pistol and ordering tellers to put money into a duffel bag. After she saw police outside, she took six bank employees hostage, authorities said.

Clay in the back and held her from behind as her daughter scratched Clay's face and pulled her hair.

Mississippi lawmakers bar governor from speaking

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi lawmakers have snubbed Gov. Kirk Fordice, barring him from making a final address to the Legislature.

Fordice, who cannot seek a third term because of term limits, had lashed out at legislators in his 1999 state-of-the-state address amid turmoil over his very public affair with a childhood sweetheart.

A Senate-drawn resolution that would have allowed the Republican to speak to a joint session of the Legislature died Wednesday for lack of action in the House.

"He might ask for forgiveness for some things he's done, or he might give us a good cussing out," said Rep. Charlie Smith, an independent. "I think he deserves respect, whether he's controversial or not."

Man who raped, suffocated elderly woman is executed

MCALISTER, Okla. (AP) — A man who raped and suffocated a 76-year-old woman in her Oklahoma City apartment in 1981 was executed by injection early Thursday.

Malcolm Rent Johnson, 41, was pronounced dead at 12:13 a.m., becoming the first inmate executed in the United States this year.

Johnson had been on death row for almost 18 years after being convicted of killing Ura Alma Thompson.

Oklahoma County District Attorney Bob Macy, who prosecuted Johnson, said Johnson was identified in several rapes or attempted rapes involving elderly women. He



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